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ABSTRACT

Several major reports on the status of education in the United States have been presented to the public and to educators and government bodies in recent years. Nine of these reports provide the source material for this document on the state of the search for educational excellence: Adler's "Paideia Proposal," "A Nation at Risk," "Making the Grade," the College Board's "Academic Preparation for College," "Action for Excellence," Sizer's "Horace's Compromise"; Goodlad's "A Place Called School," "Educating Americans for the 21st Century," and Boyer's "High School." The more than 700 recommendations and guiding principals presented in these reports have been reduced to an essential 88 in this review. The document begins by examining definitions of excellence, then turns to the problem of selecting and organizing the recommendations practically. Several operationally oriented categories are used: (1) goals and curriculum priorities; (2) standards, expectations, and requirements; (3) instructional content and process; (4) school organization and instructional delivery; (5) instructional time; (6) acquiring and using available resources; and (7) staff roles, responsibilities, and rewards. A section on principles, procedures, and materials to use in acting on the recommendations in a structured, effective way completes the docment. (PGD)

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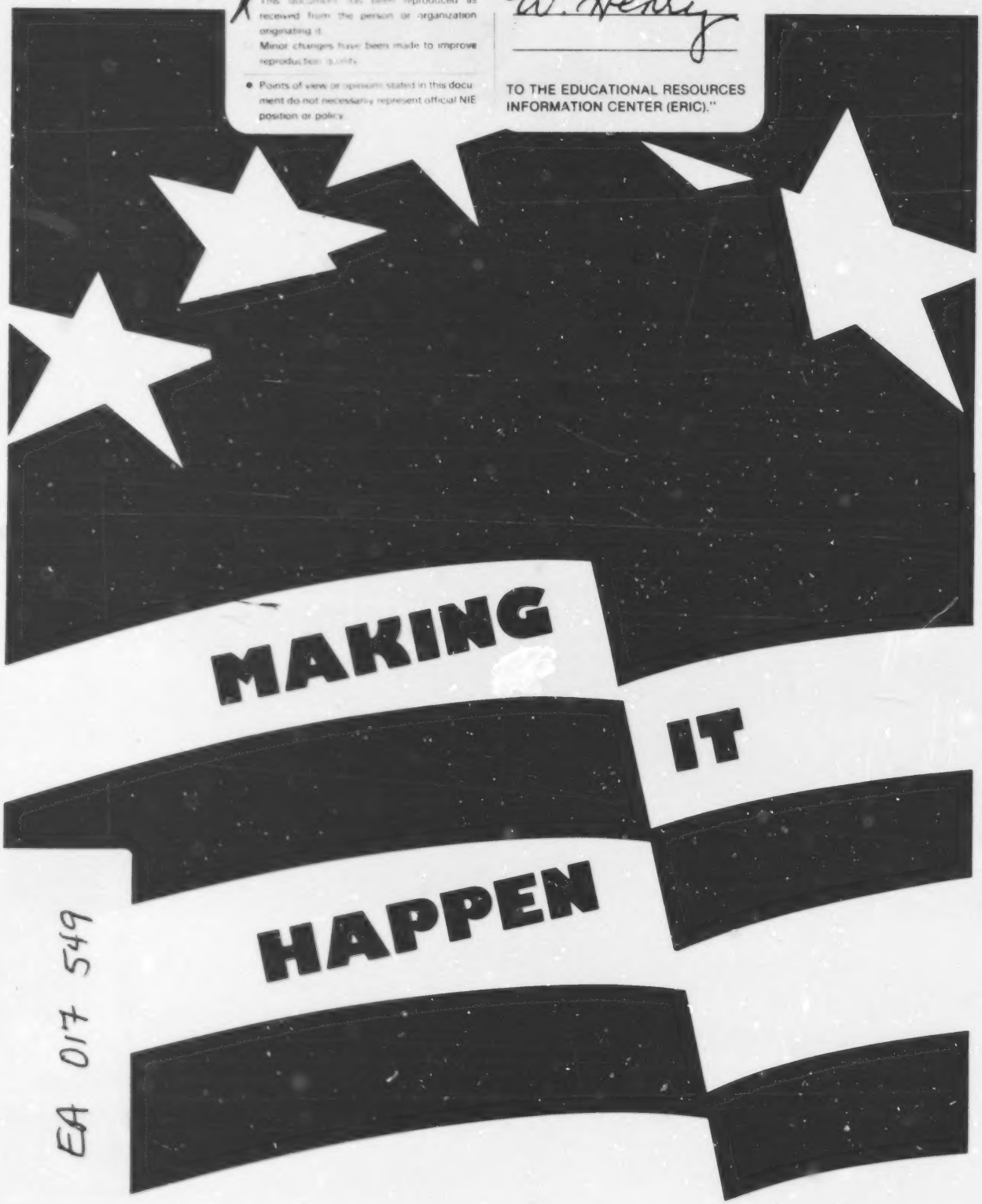
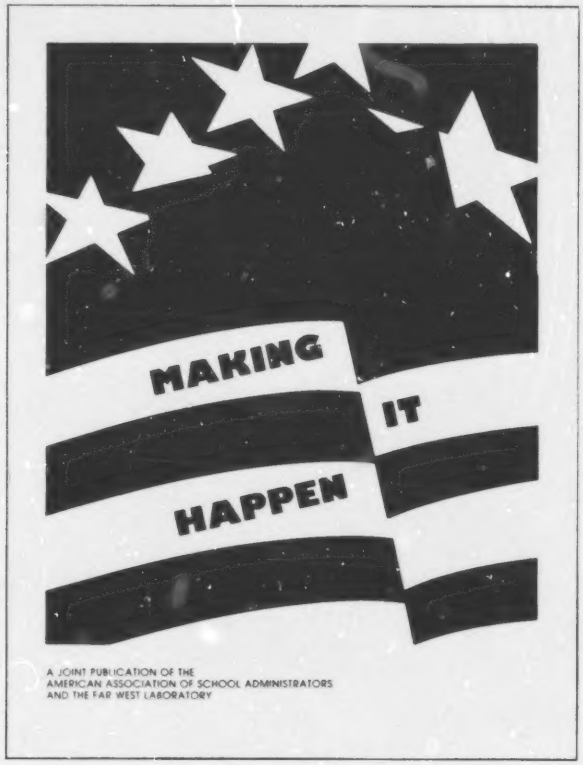


A JOINT PUBLICATION OF THE
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS
AND THE FAP WEST LABORATORY

EXCELLENCE IN OUR SCHOOLS:
MAKING IT HAPPEN



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EXCELLENCE in our schools

Why This Publication?

The schools of our nation are faced with what could well be a once-in-a-generation opportunity for significant reform. Nearly 30 reports on the condition of education have placed American schools in the national spotlight. Polls now show that citizens are willing to support legitimate efforts that will lead to more effective education for students. However, national attention is fleeting. Schools must act now to initiate improvements and build support before the warm glow of opportunity fades.

Why have the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development come together to prepare this publication? Here are a few of the reasons:

• Some very thoughtful studies and reports have not received as much attention as others. The information and ideas from these studies deserve the consideration of local educators and policy makers who may not be familiar with them.

• When combined, the reports contain hundreds of recommendations. The task of dealing coherently with such a mass of sometimes conflicting testimony and suggestions is difficult. This publication sorts through the recommendations and attempts to bring clarity and focus. By clustering those recommendations which relate closely to each other and by reducing the overall number of recommendations to consider, we have made the task of understanding what is important in these reports easier.

• As we mentioned, the time for action is now. Included in this publication, beginning on page 27, is a process we urge school leaders to use in **turning recommendations into plans of action.** We commend those schools that have already begun improvement efforts and urge them to use the ideas in this publication to support their current initiatives. Renewal and improvement are a never-ending process.

• The several reports mention responsibilities to be undertaken by many groups in our society. In this publication, we have concentrated on **issues and variables over which local school districts have major, direct control.**

• AASA's National Center for the Improvement of Learning (NCIL) and the Far West Laboratory are deeply committed to educational improvement.

• A sound educational system is basic to our defense, our economy, our nation's competitive position in the world and the very success of our free and democratic society. All citizens share a responsibility for their schools. This publication presents information to help improve education. It provides an opportunity for educators and communities to rally around one of our nation's most vital institutions . . . its schools.

Obviously, this publication is more than a summary of major national reports. It represents a critical analysis, synthesis and framing of the most promising ideas and recommendations in these reports. The ideas, questions, and recommendations posed here can be valuable resources for communities of any size to use in strengthening their schools. We hope that district leaders will use it as a rallying point for the support their schools deserve.

Introduction

1983 may go down in the history of public education as "The Year of the Reports." Between April and September no fewer than eight studies or reports of national significance reached the presses and the public, accompanied by dozens of similar documents with a more narrow state, regional, or subject matter focus. Of these, *A Nation at Risk*, the report of Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell's National Commission on Excellence in Education, received the most media and political attention and almost immediately launched a flurry of policy making activity in state capitals and local district board rooms.

But as each succeeding report was published, thoughtful educators, board members, and parents began to note significant differences in their messages and proposed solutions. Everyone seemed to be advocating **excellence in our schools**, but the definitions of excellence and what approach to use in **making it happen** were anything but unanimous. As the numbers of reports and differing recommendations rose, so did the confusion of local educators about where to begin to get a handle on the improvement process in their own districts.

The American Associa-

tion of School Administrators and some other educational leadership organizations began at once sharing the substance of the several recommendations with local educators. AASA suggested a process for turning recommendations into action. That process is nearly identical to the one found in this book on pages 25 through 31.

In some cases, educators were skeptical about the reports. Many had already undertaken improvement efforts. Nevertheless, most cautioned that this opportunity to build support for even better schools should not be lost to defensiveness.

Quantity and Focus

The nine reports selected for inclusion in this book contain more than 500 explicit recommendations. At least another 200 are either imbedded in the text or expressed as basic principles and guidelines rather than as formal recommendations. Many of these recommendations contain several components or different kinds of suggestions, which takes the number of potential "action steps" into the thousands. With so many things to consider, it might seem easier to dismiss the entire matter as impossible or to select a few "easy ones" and work at them. Obviously, our schools cannot afford either approach.

In addition, the recommendations are intended for diverse audiences. Many recommendations, for example, are targeted to federal and state agencies instead of local districts. These agencies have the distinct responsibility, jurisdiction, or potential for marshalling the resources to carry out specific mandates. Among those responsibilities are equity, and assuring that schools receive the support they need to undergird the state and national interest we have in education. Nevertheless, local educators cannot ignore these recommendations, because local action is often needed to carry out state and federal requirements. More than three-quarters of all the recommendations imply local action of one kind or another.

Since the need for cutting through this mass of information is obvious, we have selected and reduced the number of key recommendations for local action to 88.

Divergent Perspectives

One real problem in these reports is their diversity of views. This makes local decision making difficult. For example, *Action for Excellence* and the National Science Board Commission imply that improving education cannot be accomplished without improving math and science education and the teachers responsible. But, Ernest Boyer and the *Making the Grade* task force argue that language development is the key to educational success and should represent our top priority. In addition, *A Nation at Risk* and *Academic Preparation for College* are both mainly concerned with what is required of the college-bound student. Mortimer Adler, John Goodlad, and Theodore Sizer, on the other hand, all maintain that major gains can and must be made by all students—through greater attention to improving curriculum and how it is delivered to students.

In selecting recommendations for inclusion in this publication, we have retained a comprehensive view of what excellence means and how districts can concretely make it happen.

The Many Levels of Change

A major question for many local educators and board members is where to begin changing things, since the number of factors that could be altered is overwhelming. Furthermore, the different reports stress certain factors over others. This leaves the impression that achieving excellence requires changing "everything," which is impossible. Changing "anything" is too haphazard and ineffective. This dilemma is compounded by the fact that only a few of the reports provide a sound rationale for recommendations made for directly improving teaching and learning.

Therefore, in selecting recommendations that will provide significant leverage in local improvement efforts, we have employed a sound rationale that is firmly grounded in strong research, insightful theory, and exemplary practice.

The Incomplete Research Base

The appeals for excellence made in each report are based on legitimate concerns and documented problems. However, only three of these reports are based directly on extensive research conducted in schools and classrooms with a focus on the teaching process. The others are based primarily on the thinking and experience of their authors, supplemented with testimony taken at hearings and findings from large surveys. The reports by Boyer, Goodlad, and Sizer differ from most of the others in regard to their focus on the specific pedagogy of teachers, the structuring of instructional opportunities and classrooms, and the social organization of schools.

Another important point: Even with these factors included, however, none of the reports is based on a comprehensive analysis of the substantial body of research and thinking available on effective instruction. Consequently, even by directly following the recommendations found in these reports, practitioners cannot assume that they will be pursuing the most productive course of action. Understanding the research is a must.

Implementing a truly effective improvement process requires careful reading and interpretation of the most promising recommendations as well as thorough consideration of the issues, implications, and cautions associated with them.

The Nine Reports

• **The Paideia Proposal.** Mortimer Adler's 1982 treatise advocates strengthening America's democratic institutions through a one-track, 12-year system of public schooling dedicated to a thorough general/liberal education for **all** students. Its three primary goals are (1) mental, moral and spiritual growth and improvement; (2) effective enfranchised citizens in a healthy democracy; and (3) the capacity for every adult to earn a living in our advanced industrial economy. These goals would be accomplished by giving every student stimulating opportunities for (1) acquiring information and organized knowledge through didactic instruction and lecturing, (2) developing intellectual skills through demonstration and coaching, and (3) enlarging his/ her understanding and appreciation of values and human culture through Socratic dialogue and discussion.

• **A Nation at Risk.** The product of many months of collecting testimony and reviewing documents addressing the quality of education in the United States, this report focuses primarily on the high school years. Its main concerns are adding rigor and raising standards in both teaching and learning. Many consider its emphasis on traditional academic curricula, teacher roles and school structures as a strength. Others view it as a fundamental weakness. The report's recommendations fall into five categories: content, standards and expectations, time, teaching, and leadership and fiscal support. Its curriculum recommendations, "The Five New Basics," are identical to those advocated by the Committee of Ten in 1893, but its concerns about textbook evaluation and quality are considered by many to be long overdue.

• **Making the Grade.** This report, produced by the Twentieth Century Fund, focuses on the legitimate and essential role of the federal government in supporting elementary and secondary education. Its task force members included a cross section of distinguished educators. The report also emphasizes the need for English language skills as the key to educational success and full participation in adult society and points out a number of areas in which enlightened federal support is vital.

• **Academic Preparation for College.** This College Board publication is the outgrowth of a multi-year program called "Project EQuality." The purpose of the project was to identify the essential competencies and knowledge required of college entrants. This report reflects consensus views of hundreds of academic specialists, teachers, guidance counselors and admissions officers from all parts of the country. It documents in some detail seven major competencies needed for academic success in college and describes factual knowledge and understanding needed in six major areas of academic study. A significant message included in the report is that high school diplomas are inadequate indicators of preparation for college work: Only documentation of skills and knowledge will suffice.

• **Action for Excellence.** This dynamic report came from a distinguished task force of state governors and major corporation officers who addressed the relationship between a strong national economy and the educational support needed to foster and sustain it. Organized by the Education Commission of the States (ECS), the task force stressed improvements in math, science and technology, and effective school-business cooperation. The report borrows directly from *Academic Preparation for College* in defining an expanded version of "basic skills." Although its recommendations are often general and directed at state agencies and business leaders, the report does have implications for major changes in typical school operations.

• **A Study of High Schools.** This major study was headed by Theodore R. Sizer, former dean of Harvard University's Graduate ate School of Education, and co-sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). Sizer's perspective on needed change in high schools is more "radical" than that found in other reports. He draws attention to the limiting character of the schools' time-bound structure and procedures and the damaging effect on curriculum, teaching and learning that can result. Sizer's book, *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School,* was published by Houghton Mifflin in 1984. Many of the quotes in this publication came from a June 1983 article by Sizer in *Phi Delta Kappan,* in which he discussed his recommendations.

• **A Place Called School.** Published by McGraw-Hill in 1983, this report culminates John I. Goodlad's multi-year "Study of Schooling," begun in the mid 1970s and published in a long series of technical reports over the past several years. Its many recommendations are based on Goodlad's research in more than 1,000 classrooms and his long experience in working with schools to bring about change. Similar to Sizer's recommendations, Goodlad's reflect deep concern with negative consequences of age-graded, time-structured instructional systems. The Goodlad comments used in this publication have been drawn from both the book and from his article in the April 1983 issue of *Phi Delta Kappan.*

• **Educating Americans for the 21st Century.** This thorough, well-documented "plan of action for improving mathematics, science, and technology education for all American elementary and secondary student" was produced for the National Science Foundation by the National Science Board Commission on Precollege Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology. Its recommendations naturally reflect curriculum, teaching and improvement strategies in those particular areas. The report's reasoning about curriculum organization and teacher qualifications is sound and can be applied across the board to other instructional policies and procedures.

• **High School.** This Harper and Row publication was released by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in September 1983, following 30 months of work in 15 states. Its author, Ernest L. Boyer, the Foundation's president and former U.S. Commissioner of Education, stressed change that would strengthen teachers and teaching in high schools. Like Sizer and Goodlad, Boyer believes that to operate more effectively, high schools require clearly defined goals. He feels those goals should shape curriculum priorities (i.e., a "core curriculum"), essential student outcomes, and opportunities for teachers to grow professionally. Boyer makes extensive recommendations concerning the recruitment, training and working conditions of teachers. He also emphasizes the crucial need to effectively teach thinking skills through language arts and writing.

NOTE: Quotes from each of these reports are included among operational components from pages 11 through 21 of this publication.

A Framework for Excellence

In considering any or all of the recommendations in these reports, local educators and policy makers will need a standard or standards against which to measure both their current practices and the suggestions they will be deliberating. One important standard is the definition of excellence which these reports imply all districts should try to attain. Of course, selecting any single concept or definition of excellence from those offered in the various reports is risky; however, local educators will benefit from having one to guide their thinking in evaluating the reports and planning for action.

A Definition of Excellence

Our definition of excellence comes from *A Nation At Risk*. We believe it provides a realistic challenge to every school, educator, and student in our country, regardless of their current educational achievements. It gives us a framework for building a plan of action, provided we are willing to push our thinking and dedication to the limits which these reports and recommendations make possible. In addition, it can be fulfilled without compromising our national commitment to equality of opportunity and equitable treatment for all citizens.

> **At the level of the individual learner, [excellence] means performing on the boundary of individual ability in ways that test and push back personal limits. (*A Nation At Risk*, p. 12).**

This definition implies that excellence in learning may never be achieved or demonstrated in a purely objective sense. Excellence is not, as some suggest, defined by a particular score on a standardized test nor by admission into a "quality" university. It is, instead, a state of mind in which the desire to learn more and be challenged is always present and the willingness to improve on past performances is evident. Selected research studies over the past decade suggest that it is possible for learners of all ranges of ability and socio-economic backgrounds to exceed typical performance norms when consistently provided with high quality opportunities for learning. Given this evidence, this definition of excellence would probably translate into excellent student performance and achievement scores.

But excellence in learning requires excellence in instruction. There, too, *A Nation At Risk* is particularly helpful, for it defines instructional excellence in terms of the school or college which

> **. . . sets high expectations and goals for all learners, then tries in every way possible to help students reach them. (*A Nation At Risk*, p. 12)**

If Sizer and Goodlad are correct, this definition, requiring that schools try in every way possible to help students reach high expectations and goals, represents a very serious challenge to our educational institutions—one that few, if any, are currently organized to accomplish.

Considering their line of argument, this definition poses the fundamental challenge to making excellence in student learning either a possibility or a reality in our schools. That is true largely because typical organizational forms, instructional systems, and credit systems usually prevent it. This definition may also help explain why the Sizer and Goodlad reports focus so much on the need for clearer goals, the reorganization of both the curriculum and the instructional delivery system, redefinition of traditional teaching roles, and a more creative and flexible use of available human, time, and tangible resources. Behind their reasoning is the realization that excellence in our schools requires that both definitions be put together into a single guiding principle. This we have done in the following integrated definition of excellence which is offered for your consideration:

> **Excellence occurs when the instructional system is able to provide the individual learner with an appropriate level of challenge and a realistic opportunity to succeed on a frequent and continual basis for each instructional goal in the program.**

There are several things about this new definition of excellence which encourage local educators and policy makers to take a fresh view of their instructional practices.

1. It focuses attention on the achievements of each **individual learner**, not just on whole classes or age groups.
2. It implies that conditions of both challenge and opportunity be focused on enhancing **student success**, not on failure or disqualification.
3. It requires that adjustments in the **content** and **pacing** of instruction be made frequently in order to keep individual students both challenged and successful.
4. It implies that the curriculum be organized around **clear** and **visible goals** and that instruction be con-

tinually targeted toward them.

5. It requires that we think of **instruction as a system** as well as a process—one requiring the continuous integration and coordination of important elements across classrooms and schools.

When you combine these five factors with thinking presented in the nine reports and the focus of much available research and practice on effective instruction, you get a pretty complex picture of the "state of the art" in instruction today. Consequently, having a framework for organizing all of these ideas and the information will make it easier to accomplish this definition of excellence at the local level.

Weighing all of these issues and needs, we developed a framework made up of seven distinct but closely interrelated components. Because these seven components are an essential part of every school's basic operations, they exist in one form or another in all schools. We believe that the two keys to major school improvements are: (1) arranging the components so that they interact with each other in a mutally supportive and consistent way and (2) using each in a way that consistently supports this general definition of excellence. Clustering the recommendations into these seven operational components is the first step in organizing an effective plan of action.

Seven Operational Components

1. Goals and Curriculum Priorities

Goals reflect the purposes of educational endeavor and define the targets toward which the curriculum is deliberately directed. Decisions about what to include in the curriculum should be based on what we want students to be like and be able to do when they finish any particular phase of their schooling experience. Increasingly, educators are discussing the need for "outcome goals."

2. Standards, Expectations, and Requirements

Standards and requirements determine under what conditions students receive formal credit for their achievements and become eligible for passage through and out of the system. How they are defined and used determine the "real" goals of the system since they affect student credit, eligibility, opportunity, placement, promotion, and graduation. How we grade and how we test are major aspects of these issues.

3. Instructional Content and Process

The specifics of what we want students to learn and how we help them learn those things are central to this component of the instructional system. Curriculum organization and sequencing, the methods and means used to teach that curriculum, and the learning needs and styles of students are all central aspects of "effective instruction." Improving any one of these items requires taking all of the others carefully into account.

4. School Organization and Instructional Delivery

School organization is determined by how, when, and where we group students and assign teachers to work with them. This pattern of assignments also determines where, when, and from whom students receive instruction of a given kind. The traditional pattern involves grouping students by age and having them work with a specific teacher for an entire semester or school year. What students learn and when they learn it are determined by this schedule and pattern of assignments, which is being referred to increasingly as "instructional delivery."

5. Instructional Time

Time is both a resource in the delivery of instruction and an organizer of instructional opportunities. The clock, schedule, and calendar are major organizers of time and are usually used to determine how long, how often, or when students are eligible for instructional opportunities. The arguments for increasing instructional time must be balanced against arguments for organizing and using existing time more effectively.

6. Using Available Resources

Schools have at their disposal a broad range of resources for addressing their priority goals for students. These resources include teachers, other staff, volunteers, parents, experts in the community, other students, organizations and institutions in the community, new technologies and media, textbooks, other instructional materials, and, of course, the funds necessary to acquire or provide access to these other resources. Using this broad variety of resources creatively may require modifying many traditional features of school organization, instructional delivery, and staff and student roles.

7. Staff Roles, Responsibilities, and Rewards

Staff roles are determined by the responsibilities they are assigned. Those responsibilities are very largely determined by the major goals and purposes of the school and by how each of the other operational components in this framework is defined. At the same time, however, decisions made about staff roles strongly affect the nature of these other components. Therefore, staff training, evaluation, and professional rewards all depend on the kind of roles and responsibilities we expect staff to assume.

Using the Components As a

In reviewing the reports and various summaries of the reports, it appears that labels used to categorize recommendations are often too broad, static, and, at times, unimaginative, to be useful in developing a systematic and effective plan of action. Often, recommendations describing very different operational features or issues are placed in the same category—such as "Curriculum"—as if the differences among them or their dynamic interrelationship could be ignored. They cannot.

Of course, a recommendation's substance is more important than its label. But, the categories of recommendations often reflect a great deal about how authors and their interpreters view the operations and "realities" of schooling. By placing recommendations in one category or another, authors are able to affect how readers interpret and might use them. This publication presents the foregoing framework for precisely that reason.

These seven components are used here as a framework for organizing and then implementing the recommendations grouped under them. As you develop plans of action, think about the recommendations in relation to those categories. Granted, this is but one of many possible frameworks that could have been used. However, it is responsive to the definition of excellence offered earlier and provides a productive way for dealing with the most promising recommendations in the reports.

First, the framework is constructed around two fundamental starting points:

1. Successful action proceeds from clear intention.
2. That intention is reflected in the qualities and capabilities we want students to possess as the result of their schooling experience.

Those "outcome goals" are not vague ideals but are the tangible targets toward which curriculum, teaching, testing, school organization, and resource allocation are all directed and around which standards and expectations are defined. In this framework, **goals precede and supercede all of the other components.** Of course, setting goals which command broad support requires that educators look beyond themselves and communicate

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Criteria for Selecting Recommendations

First, in selecting recommendations for this publication, we chose from the outset to focus on issues and variables over which local school districts had major direct control. Second, we felt they should describe school-based phenomena directly related to instruction and learning. (College admissions standards and teacher training curricula are examples that fall outside of our consideration, but they may need to be addressed politically by local districts.) Third, we selected from the recommendations in the nine reports those which best reflected both the substance and spirit of what the best available research and practice suggest is most likely to foster excellence. Fourth, because of our desire to be succinct, whenever possible we avoided listing similar recommendations from different studies. Consequently there is little overlap in the recommendations we included. Fifth, we did not include recommendations that "simply sounded appealing," but which lacked a convincing rationale for being a key factor in enhancing excellence.

What follows, then, is an elaboration of our framework for pursuing excellence at the local level. Contained within its seven closely interrelated components are 88 individual recommendations drawn from the nine reports. Some are succinct, simple statements. Others are long and more complex. Recommendations surrounded by quotation marks are direct quotes from the document cited. Those without quotation marks are paraphrases of longer lines of argument which we have condensed in order to save space.

Since the magnitude and significance of the individual recommendations vary so greatly, it is difficult to judge whether any one report seems to overshadow the others in importance. Granted, there are 23 separate items from Boyer's *High School*, but his report contains 93. On the other hand, 11 of Sizer's 14 recommendations survived our selection process, as did a great number of Goodlad's highly interrelated suggestions.

While we are tempted to view these 88 recommendations as the essential elements of an integrated whole, we are reluctant to do so for two major reasons. First,

openly with the public.

Second, consistent with this line of thinking, local school districts should develop standards and expectations that embody, reflect, and depend on the goals they expect students to attain. The same is true for the curriculum. Decisions about what to teach, how to teach it, and when to teach it should depend on what we want students to know, do, and be capable of experiencing. Most would agree that no part of the curriculum is important in its own right—it is valuable to the extent that it directly contributes to what we want to help students become.

Third, how the schooling experience for students is organized and how and when schools provide opportunities to learn also depend on the factors just mentioned. Again, there is little about our school organization, time structure, role structure, or use of facilities, people, and resources that needs to be a given way just because it's "school." The seven components in our framework encourage districts to look at how they organize staff and students for instructional delivery. They also encourage schools to examine how they use their time and resources and how they define staff roles and responsibilities in order to best accomplish their goals.

Fourth, the framework encourages districts to appreciate the close interrelationship of these seven factors. Decisions about staff roles affect decisions about school structure; decisions about structure affect decisions about instructional delivery; decisions about instructional delivery affect decisions about instructional time; and decisions about instructional time affect decisions about standards, eligibility, and opportunity ...and vice versa. Although each component can be understood in isolation from the others, they are difficult to separate in practice. Change in any one component may affect the character and impact of several others, just as refusing to change any one of them could prevent change in those we do wish to alter. Therefore, we believe that understanding these interrelationships is a key to planning successful change.

vary considerably. Second, the 88, as stated, do not include all of the variables that would need to be addressed in designing a set of "ideal" instructional models. The recommendations alone just don't tell the whole story. That is why we believe they must be considered in light of the broader issues, questions, and cautions we raise in dealing with each component. In fact, we hope these questions, implications, and cautions stimulate at least as much serious thinking and discussion as the recommendations themselves, since they raise serious issues not treated adequately in many of the reports.

Taken together, then, we are confident that this expanded framework and condensed set of recommendations provide local educators with a more coherent and workable guide for action than an be found in any single report or set of reports.

Some of what is presented will undoubtedly require local educators to look beyond the familiar in dealing with school improvement, but that is to be expected. None of the recommendations requires action that is not already under way in at least some schools.

Operational Component I

Goals and Curriculum Priorities

The Key Issues

Most of the reports are critical of what can be decribed as the schools' lack of instructional focus and philosophical coherence. Consequently, almost all of them advocate some form of "core curriculum" for all students. However, having a curriculum is not enough. What is really essential is clarity and broad commitment regarding the purposes and goals which **should** be in place to guide curriculum decisions and development.

Here are some key questions to ask in addressing your district's goals and curriculum priorities:

- What are the competencies, capacities, and qualities that we want **all** of our young people to have as outcomes of their schooling experience?
- Are we willing to state them as explicit goals? If so, what are they?
- What are the instructional, developmental, and social experiences students will need to have in order for them to attain these goals?
- Are we willing to use these goals and experiences as the basis for designing our "curriculum"?
- How will our current

subject structure be affected if we design "curriculum" around these goals?

• How do we exploit the rich diversity of individual student ability "in ways that test and push back personal limits" while simultaneously focusing on a "core curriculum"?

Guiding Recommendations From the Reports

The Need For Explicit Outcome Goals

1. "States should articulate clearly the full range of goals for schooling that have emerged over time and on which there now appears to be substantial agreement." (Goodlad, *PDK.)*

2. "Every high school should establish clearly stated goals—purposes that are widely shared by teachers, students, administrators and parents." (Boyer, *High School.)*

3. "In most high schools, a shorter, simpler, better-defined list of goals is necessary; this will involve shelving the long-standing claims of certain subject areas." (Sizer, *PDK.)*

The Essential Outcome Goals

1. "To achieve the desired quality of democratic education, a one-track system of public schooling for twelve years must aim directly at three main objectives . . . personal growth or self-improvement—mental, moral, and spiritual . . . the individual's role as an enfranchised citizen of this republic . . . the adult's need to earn a living in one or another occupation . . . These will be accomplished (1) by the acquisition of information and organized knowledge: (2) by the development of intellectual skills; (3) by the enlargement of the understanding." (Adler, *Paideia.*)

2. "A central goal of schooling is for students to be able to teach themselves and wish to do so . . . Higher-order thinking skills—reasoning, imagining, analyzing, synthesizing—are the core of senior high school work . . ." (Sizer, *PDK.*)

3. "The most important objective of elementary and secondary education in the United States is the development of literacy in the English language." *(Making the Grade.)*

4. "First, we must upgrade considerably our definition of basic skills . . . (to include nine major competencies which are specified in detail in the appendix of the report) . . . reading competencies, writing competencies, speaking and listening competencies, mathematical competencies, scientific competencies, reasoning competencies, basic employment competencies, economic competencies, and computer literacy competencies." *(Action for Excellence.)*

5. "School goals should focus on the mastery of language, on a common core of learning, on preparation for work and further education, and on community and civic service." (Boyer, *High School.)*

Translating Goals into Curriculum Priorities

1. "There should be extensive dialogue at the district and building levels regarding the meaning of these goals, the relative emphases to be placed on each in light of local conditions, and the means of fulfilling them . . . Unless each department considers the whole range of goals of schooling, only those goals within the narrow subject-matter specialization will be promoted in its program—and the same will be true of every department of an entire school." (Goodlad, *PDK.)*

2. "Sorting out what students require inescapably uncovers the inadequacy of traditional interpretations of subjects of study . . . The core academic structure of high school, legitimized by the Committee of Ten in 1893, maintains a ferocious hold on our thinking." (Sizer, *PDK.)*

3. "Learning outcomes... are achieved most readily through a carefully designed sequence of courses that builds progressively on student skills, concepts, and factual knowledge . . . Making place for newly important topics may involve shifting the traditional emphasis in the . . . curriculum." *(Academic Preparation for College.)*

Implications

• Several authors warn that our current subject structure is restrictive and has a strangle hold on our achieving our priority goals.

• Goals need to drive curriculum development, rather than the reverse.

• The major competencies can and should be developed in all courses of study, regardless of subject content.

• We have to know what we want to accomplish before we start teaching anything.

• We will have to make tough curriculum choices, but we cannot allow the curriculum to become narrow and parochial.

Cautions

Instructional goals cannot exist independently of graduation/certification requirements. If such requirements are inconsistent with the goals, experience tells us that the requirements will take precedence. Our major goals must determine our diploma standards, rather than the reverse—which is often the case now.

In addition, there is a substantial bias in some of these reports toward learning outcomes and curriculum priorities which favor math, science, and other purely academic subjects. Little formal attention is given to the fine and performing arts, which may be short-sighted and damaging to the aspirations and talents of many students.

Operational Component 2

Standards, Expectations, and Requirements

The Key Issues

Almost all of the reports urge schools to adopt high performance standards, high achievement expectations, and rigorous course requirements for students. They assume that each is a key to increasing learning, and they often equate all three. We suggest, however, that each is basically different from the others.

Adding course requirements and raising performance standards are not the same thing. Requirements determine what must be "taken" and "passed" in order to qualify for certain courses or for graduation, but they do not determine the actual levels of performance that must be demonstrated. While standards are also used to determine progress in the system, they define the actual performance levels which determine success and failure, qualification and disqualification, eligibility and ineligibility. To raise performance standards without improving student opportunities for reaching them will probably increase the number of failures and may discourage many from trying. The relationship among standards, learning opportunities, and goals must be made clear.

Key Questions

Here are some key questions to ask in addressing the way standards, expectations, and requirements are used in your district:

- Do our performance standards match our outcome goals?
- What should be the basis of eligibility for progress through the curriculum?
- Should tests and standards be used to disqualify students from progressing through the curriculum?
- Should credit, promotion, and/or diplomas be awarded whenever clearly defined performance standards are reached?
- How can we raise standards without increasing the failure rate?

Guiding Recommendations from the Reports

Prerequisites for High School Study

1. "Elementary school should build on the remarkable language skills a child has already acquired. In the early grades, students should learn to read and comprehend the main ideas in written work, write standard English sentences and present their ideas orally." (Boyer, *High School.)*

2. "The English proficiency of all students should be formally assessed before they go to high school. A pre-high summer term and an intensive freshman year remediation program should be provided for students who are deficient in the use of English." (Boyer, *High School.)*

3. "Students entering high school unable to read, write, and cipher adequately will have to concentrate exclusively on these subjects." (Sizer, *PDK.)*

Performance Expectations

1. "Students learn best when excellence is expected of them and when they are encouraged to achieve it. They need incentives and stimulation to learning." *(Academic Preparation for College.)*

2. "For classroom instruction to be effective, expectations should be high, standards clear, evaluation fair, and students should be held accountable for their work." (Boyer, *High School.)*

3. "We recommend that the states and local school systems establish firm, explicit, and demanding requirements concerning . . . homework, grades, and other essentials of effective schooling, and that parents be enlisted in the education process in ways that are not now sufficiently widespread. We have in mind "contracts" between parents, students, and schools to improve student performance." *(Action for Excellence.)*

4. "Each state and local school system should improve its programs for identifying and educating handicapped children, specifically including them in its goals of education for jobs and economic growth." *(Action for Excellence.)*

Attendance Expectations

1. "We recommend that the states and local school systems establish firm, explicit, and demanding requirements concerning . . . discipline, attendance, and other essentials of effective schooling . . ." *(Action for Excellence.)*

2. "We recommend that each state and local school system—indeed, the principals, teachers and parents in each school—launch an energetic program to reduce absenteeism. We recommend further that each state and local community also establish broadly-based community programs to solve the dropout problem . . . Merely stiffening attendance requirements is not enough: efforts to deal with absenteeism and the dropout problem must also include revitalizing course materials and making educational schedules flexible enough to accommodate students who have special problems." *(Action for Excellence.)*

3. "Every high school district, working with a community college, should have a reentry school arrangement to permit dropouts to return

to school part time or full time or to engage in independent study to complete their education." (Boyer, *High School.)*

Bases of Credit, Promotion, and Graduation

1. "We recommend that fair and effective programs be established to monitor student progress through periodic testing of general achievement and specific skills. Because the purpose of such testing should be to identify problems and deficiencies promptly, every school system should link its testing program to a carefully designed program of remediation and enrichment for students who need special help. We recommend, moreover, that the practice of "social" or chronological promotions be abolished; promotion from grade to grade should be based on mastery, not age." *(Action for Excellence.)*

2. Grades should be indicators of academic achievement so they can be relied on as evidence of a student's readiness for further study." *(A Nation At Risk.)*

3. "Until mastery of subject matter determines whether or not a diploma is granted, students will see minimal incentives for achieving such mastery. There must be some kind of culminating examination or other exhibition of mastery to place the emphasis of schooling squarely on learning." (Sizer, *PDK.)*

4. "The number of required courses in the core curriculum should be expanded from one-half to two-thirds of the total units required for high school graduation." (Boyer, *High School)*

Implications

- Several authors agree that having students begin high school instruction without the necessary prerequisites is futile. They must be given those essentials to ease the transition.
- High expectations generally stimulate success; high standards alone may discourage or prevent it.
- Clear expectations and standards provide targets for success. Students who reach those targets should be given full recognition and credit.
- Our current credit and promotion systems are too closely tied to time.
- Eligibility should be kept open for any students making progress toward core program goals.
- Equal opportunity and the special needs of students must be a primary consideration in determining the use of performance standards.

Cautions

None of the reports deals adequately with the evaluation/certification/eligibility issues in schools. It is one thing to raise standards; it is another to develop clear criteria for those standards which match learning goals. High schools, in particular, structure credit and eligibility systems around time. For example, Carnegie Units, measures of seat time, continue to determine the basis of graduation and diplomas. Courses are defined by time spent (i.e., semester hours) rather than by goals reached. Consequently, diploma requirements which are stated in terms of courses completed rather than outcomes reached may have little bearing on the actual learning achievements of students.

Operational Component 3

Instructional Content and

The Key Issues

Virtually all of the reports agree that schools need to teach more of what is important, and weed out what is unnecessary. They also agree that the methods and tools of instruction need to be improved to match what needs to be learned. Districts must make curriculum choices consistent with their outcome goals and learning priorities. This may mean that many learning materials now available are no longer suitable for what the district's teachers need to accomplish with their students. It will also mean that elementary and secondary curricula must have a much closer connection to each other and allow students in one setting to study curricula typically offered in the other if their learning needs warrant it.

Key Questions

Here are some key questions to ask in addressing the types of instructional content and processes available to students in your district:

- How do we know that we are structuring, sequencing, and teaching the components of the curriculum in the most effective way?
- What can we do to improve instruction so that conceptual/thinking abilities can be taught in combination with skills and facts?
- What changes in methods and tools will bring about more active participation by students in the learning process?
- Do we need to improve textbook selection procedures or supplement textbooks with many more targeted resource materials?
- How can we be sure that our elementary curriculum is an adequate stepping stone to high school and that high school isn't more of the same or a repeat of much elementary work?

Guiding Recommendations from the Reports

Curriculum Organization

1. "Top priority must be placed on providing increased and more effective instruction in mathematics, science, and technology in grades K-6." *(National Science Board Commission.)*

2. "Where nonessential and peripheral courses have invaded the curriculum, school systems must have the courage to put new emphasis on core academic subjects and must devote more time to them. Students should be introduced earlier to such critical subjects as science, and they should spend more time exploring them." *(Action for Excellence.)*

3. "Mathematics instruction at the elementary level should be designed to produce the following outcomes: comprehensive understanding of and facility with one-digit number facts, place values, decimals, percentages and exponential notations; skill in informal

Process

mental arithmetic, estimation and approximation; ability to use calculators and computers selectively; basic understanding of elementary data analysis, simple statistics and probability, and fractions; ability to use some algebraic symbolism and techniques; and thorough understanding of arithmetic operations and knowledge of when each should be used." *(National Science Board Commission.)*

4. "Some components in the traditional secondary school mathematics curriculum have little importance in the light of new technologies. The current sequence which isolates geometry in a year-long course, rather than integrating aspects of geometry over several years with other mathematics courses, must be seriously challenged . . . Other components can be streamlined, leaving room for important new topics." *(National Science Board Commission.)*

5. "Highlights of the core curriculum are . . . literature, United States history, western civilization, non-western civilization, science and the natural world, mathematics, foreign language, the arts, civics, technology, health, and work." (Boyer, *High School.)*

Instructional Tools and Materials

1. "New instructional materials should reflect the most current applications of technology in appropriate curriculum areas, the best scholarship in each discipline, and research in learning and teaching." *(A Nation At Risk.)*

2. "Textbooks seldom communicate to students the richness and excitement of original works. The classroom use of primary source materials should be expanded." (Boyer, *High School.)*

3. "In considering textbooks for adoption, States and school districts should: (a) evaluate texts and other materials on their ability to present rigorous and challenging material clearly; and (b) require publishers to furnish evaluation data on the material's effectiveness." *(A Nation At Risk.)*

4. "New science curricula that incorporate appropriate scientific and technical knowledge and are oriented toward practical issues are needed. They also will provide an excellent way of fostering traditional basic skills." *(National Science Board Commission.)*

5. "No school should buy computers, or any other expensive piece of hardware, until key questions have been asked—and answered. Why is this purchase being made? What educational objectives will be served? Is available software as good as the equipment? Which students will use the new equipment, when, and why?" (Boyer, *High School.)*

6. "In purchasing computers, schools should base their decisions not only on the quality of the equipment, but also on the quality of the instructional material available." (Boyer, *High School.)*

Appropriate Instructional Methods

1. Teachers should engage students more actively in learning by applying methods appropriate to each part of the core curriculum: using didactic instruction, lectures and responses, and textbooks and other aids to enhance student acquisition of organized knowledge; using coaching, exercises, and supervised practice to enhance intellectual skills; and using Socratic questioning and active participation to enlarge student understanding of ideas and values. (Paraphased from Adler, *Paideia.)*

2. "Teachers should use a variety of teaching styles—lecturing to transmit information, coaching to teach a skill and Socratic questioning to enlarge understanding. But there should be particular emphasis on the active participation of the student." (Boyer, *High School.)*

3. Teachers should be better able to teach in different ways for different purposes; vary the medium and student groupings, etc.; diagnose student problems; give clear instructions; give positive, helpful feedback; use time efficiently; provide personal attention to students; get and keep students engaged; and teach higher-order skills. Applying Mastery Learning principles to these tasks would enhance their effectiveness. (Paraphrased from Goodlad, *A Place Called School.)*

4. "Students will achieve these learning outcomes (specified in detail in the Academic Preparation for College report) when instruction is keyed to the stages of their intellectual development." *(Academic Preparation for College.)*

Implications

- Much needs to be done to strengthen and reorganize mathematics and science instruction in the elementary grades.
- Tough choices may have to be made in modifying or deleting elements of the current curriculum.
- We cannot rely on existing textbooks alone to do the job.
- Teaching skills need to be enhanced.
- Computers are useful, but don't count on them alone to solve your instructional problems.
- Teaching must be keyed to what the students can do and the kinds of outcomes we want them to accomplish.

Cautions

Because of the heavy concern in several reports with math/science deficiencies, the reports as a whole contain better examples of curriculum goals and content in those areas than in other subjects. Nonetheless, those other areas also deserve equally tough scrutiny by local districts. Also, if Socratic questioning and active participation are, in fact, keys to students acquiring thinking and analysis skills, districts would probably be better off investing in sustained staff development in those areas rather than in simply purchasing textbooks that may not be sufficient for enhancing either teaching skills or student capacities. The strong emphasis in these reports on enhancing teacher subject matter knowledge needs to be accompanied by an equally strong emphasis on strengthening teacher instructional skills.

Operational Component 4

School Organization and Instructional Delivery

The Key Issues

School organization refers to the ways teachers and students are assigned to work together to accomplish the instructional goals of the program. These assignment patterns—such as tracking, age-grading, course schedules, and class periods—determine how long, how often, and when particular groups of students work with particular teachers on particular learning goals or components of the curriculum. In effect, those assignment patterns determine the eligibility and opportunity conditions for instructional delivery and student learning which occur within individual schools and across levels of schooling (such as primary, middle school, and high school). Usually these assignment patterns are predetermined by the calendar and the schedule and regulated on a daily basis by the clock. The major concern of some authors is whether these assignment patterns unnecessarily inhibit instructional flexibility and responsiveness. If so, they may be aiding administrative efficiency but not fostering instructional effectiveness.

Several reports say little if anything about these issues. Others point out how school organization can affect instructional delivery, eligibility conditions, teacher role responsibilities, and student learning.

Here are some key questions to ask about school organization and instructional delivery in your district:

- How can school organization be made more flexible to meet the day to day learning needs of students?
- What could be done to change grouping arrangements or patterns of student/teacher assignments to enhance student learning success and progress through the program?
- Can instruction be delivered via skill groups rather than age groups?
- What can be done to reduce the often excessive time structuring of schools?
- Should promotion decisions be made at times other than the end of the semester or school year?

Guiding Recommendations

School Structure

1. Local schools should organize themselves into relatively autonomous four-year multi-grade units consisting of teams of teachers responsible for not more than 100 students at the elementary level and 160 students at the secondary level. Each team would be responsible for its own rooms and cohort of youngsters, share common facilities such as the library and gymnasium, and be led by a head teacher with advanced training and special responsibilities. Youngsters would progress through three four-year phases of schooling, beginning at age four. At ages 16-18 they would engage in service and work study programs in preparation for college or the labor market. This teacher teaming structure reduces teacher isolation, enhances professional communication and advancement, utilizes instructional time and resources more effectively, and opens the possibility of peer teaching arrangements which research shows to be of considerable benefit to students on a variety of dimensions.

Operational Component 5

Instructional Time

The Key Issues

There is an almost universal appeal in these reports for more time for instruction (i.e., longer school days, weeks, and years). This appeal is directly related to the desire for higher levels of achievement overall and for more attention to core subject areas (e.g., math and science) that are too often neglected in elementary schools. The key issue is whether we need to add more total time to schooling in order to have more time for instruction or whether we need to organize and use the time we have more effectively. Research shows overwhelmingly that large amounts of available classroom time are not used for instruction, and that carefully used time has major benefits. Note also that time availability and time use are both closely related to the instructional delivery issues discussed in the previous section.

Here are some key questions to ask about the need for more instructional time in your district:

- What can be done to match the amount of time available with the particular learning needs of students on a day to day basis?
- How can blocks of time be structured during the day or week to be more consistent with the time requirements of certain kinds of learning activities?
- If the school day or year were extended, what would be the best way to use that additional time?
- Is there an upper limit to how many minutes per hour or hours per day we can realistically expect teachers and students to be able to concentrate?
- Is when we teach something (i.e., timing) more important than how long we spend on it?

Guiding Recommendations

Restructuring Instructional Time

1. "The frenetic quality of many high schools needs

(Paraphrased from Goodlad, *A Place Called School.)*

2. "The last two years of high school should be considered a 'transition school,' a program in which about half the time is devoted to 'elective clusters.'" (Boyer, *High School.)*

Opportunity and Advancement

1. "Age-grading must cease, and students must be allowed to progress at their own rates. Adult attitudes about 'where a student should be' will also have to change; the assumption must always be that mastery is not only possible but expected." (Sizer, *PDK.)*

2. "The school program should offer a single track for all students, one that includes a strong grounding in the basic tools of education and a study of the core curriculum. While the first two years would be devoted almost exclusively to the common core, a portion of this work would continue into the third or fourth year." (Boyer, *High School.)*

3. Schools should eliminate tracking. All students should take the same three part core curriculum focusing on acquisition of knowledge, development of intellectual skills, and expanded understanding of ideas and values. (Paraphrased from Adler, *Paideia.)*

4. "Placement and grouping of students as well as promotion and graduation policies should be guided by the academic progress of students and their instructional needs, rather than by rigid adherence to age." *(A Nation At Risk.)*

5. "Every high school should offer special arrangements for gifted students—credit by examination, independent study, and accelerated programs." (Boyer, *High School.)*

6. "Every high school in the nation should offer a 'university in the school' program and a variety of other arrangements—credit by examination, early admission, and advance placement—to permit able students to accelerate their academic programs." (Boyer, *High School.)*

7. "School districts and community colleges should cooperate in providing appropriate opportunities for students whose mathematics and/or science preparation is adequate to allow them to take the next steps in their education." *(National Science Board Commission.)*

Implications

- Grouping arrangements that create barriers to instructional opportunity must be removed.
- We need flexible grouping and assignment arrangements in order to give students instruction when they can best benefit from it.
- Existing differences in students' total programs and achievements can be reduced by adding flexibility to the scheduling and length of "courses" and the timing and frequency of "final" examinations.
- Promotion or graduation could occur at different times during a given year for different students.
- The sharp distinctions among grade levels, levels of schooling, and schools and colleges should all be reduced.

Cautions

We are historically and culturally conditioned to defining and describing both schools and students in age-grade terms. Those "time-based" labels, such as first grade, second grade, and third grade, also describe and define our elementary textbooks, our expectations for student progress, our scheduling of course offerings, and our standardized test performance norms. As a whole, the recommendations in this section are asking us to reorganize schools and instructional delivery around **student performance levels** instead of age or "ability"—levels which change on a frequent basis as students learn and grow. Since these changes will be difficult to make, despite their merits, educators will have to be unyielding in their commitment to employ action strategies that lead to improvements in this area.

to be eased, the pace slowed and larger blocks of time made available for the kind of dialectical teaching that is a necessary part of helping adolescents learn to think clearly and constructively." (Sizer, *PDK.)*

2. "The class schedule should be more flexibly arranged to permit larger blocks of instructional time, especially in courses such as a laboratory science, foreign language, and creative writing." *(Boyer, High School.)*

3. "Using the existing school year and existing school day to the fullest must be emphasized. But the states and local school systems should also consider lengthening the school year and the school day and extending teachers' contracts. Learning time should be increased, moreover, by establishing a wider range of learning opportunities beyond the normal school day and school year: summer institutes and after-school enrichment programs sponsored by business people, for example." *(Action for Excellence.)*

4. "Considerably more time should be devoted to the study of mathematics, science and technology throughout the elementary and secondary grades. Consequently, the school day, week and/or year must be substantially lengthened." *(National Science Board Commission.)*

5. Schools should aim for the following time distributions in the allocation of student instructional time: 18% devoted to literature and language, 18% devoted to math and science, 15% devoted to social studies and society, 15% devoted to the arts, 15% devoted to voc-ed/career preparation and 10% individual choice. (Paraphrased from Goodlad, *A Place Called School.)*

Using Available Time

1. "The time available for learning should be expanded through better classroom management and organization of the school day. If necessary, additional time

Instructional Time (Cont.)

should be found to meet the special needs of slow learners, the gifted, and others who need more instructional diversity than can be accommodated during a conventional school day or year." *(A Nation At Risk.)*

2. "Instruction in effective study and work skills, which are essential if school and independent time is to be used efficiently, should be introduced in the early grades and continued throughout the student's schooling." *(A Nation At Risk.)*

3. "Class size must be limited. Teachers must be freed from trivial demands and allowed to teach. Schools should examine each school year, especially the twelfth grade year, to ensure that time is not wasted. And existing learning time should be made more effective in other ways as well, through the use of student 'mentors,' for example, through the use of high quality and up to date textbooks and through the use of technologies in education—computers, film and videotape, for example —in ways that extend the reach of teachers." *(A Nation At Risk.)*

4. Instructionally, fewer well-used hours may be more effective than more hours using sterile instructional methods. (Paraphrased from Goodlad, *A Place Called School.)*

5. Schools should formally audit the amount of classroom time actually used for instruction. Teachers should aim to use 25 hours per week effectively. (Paraphrased from Goodlad, *A Place Called School.)*

Implications

- The typical daily schedule of uniform class periods is a questionable use of time.
- Time use, how we organize instruction, and how we teach are intimately related.
- Instructional priorities need to determine scheduling and assignments, not the clock or the calendar.
- Since the time needed for given students to master an assignment will vary,

Operational Component 6

Acquiring and

The Key Issues

Several of these reports made impassioned pleas to local, state, and federal policy makers for dramatically increased financial support for the schools. Such increases will be absolutely necessary in order to implement many of their major recommendations. But the reports also contain valuable suggestions for using resources already at hand in ways that can lead directly to increased student learning. Many districts are already implementing many of the recommendations listed below, but others are not. To do so requires a willingness to look inside and outside the four walls of the school to supplement teacher efforts.

Here are some key questions to ask in addressing resource issues in your district:

- Can learning settings outside the school be cultivated for instructional purposes?
- What arrangements can be made to use members of the community to share their expertise in or outside the school on a regular basis?
- How can we use students to assist or teach other students on a regular basis?
- What can be done to make parents active partners in the instructional program, both in the school and at home?
- What instructional support can the advanced electronic technologies provide as well as or better than teachers or textbooks?
- How can we assure equality of opportunity for all students, no matter where they live or their socio-economic conditions?

Guiding Recommendations

External Settings and Partnerships

1. "The way to connect the world of school and the world outside of school is to make thoughtful use of the latter bear usefully on the former. If a high school diploma is awarded as a validation of a student's mastery, then how that learning is mastered is not very important. It could be learned at home or on the job as well as in class." (Sizer, *PDK.)*

2. "Small high schools should expand their education offerings by using off-campus sites or mobile classrooms or part-time professionals to provide a richer education for all students." (Boyer, *High School.)*

3. ". . . High schools should also establish connections with learning places beyond the schools—such as libraries, museums, art galleries, colleges and industrial laboratories." (Boyer, *High School.)*

4. ". . . the Commission strongly recommends that local school boards foster partnerships between the school board, school administrators, local officials, business and industry, labor leaders and parents in order to facilitate constructive change. They should encourage business and other institutions not primarily involved in education to become active participants and lend fiscal, political and other support to the local education system. They should help to further plans for improving educational offerings that stress mathematics, science and technology, rigorous curricula, and high standards of student and teacher commitment and performance. They should encourage parental involvement in all these efforts . . ." *(National Science Board Commission.)*

5. "We recommend also that governors, legislators, chief state school officers, state and local boards of education and leaders in higher education establish partnerships of their own to help improve public education . . . Local boards of education might collaborate on enrichment programs for students and teachers." *(Action for Excellence.)*

Using External Personnel

1. "Parent-Teacher-Student Advisory Councils should be established at all schools. Further, a Parent Volunteer Program should be organized to tutor students, provide teacher aides,

teacher planning must anticipate these differences and have useful alternatives readily available.

• Effective time use is dependent on careful curriculum sequencing and integration; depending on textbooks alone to provide this is wishful thinking.

Cautions

Much attention has been given recently to the concept of "time on task." Time on task does not mean "the more the better." Much of what passes for time on task is busy work or unnecessary reinforcement of things already learned. Effective time on task rests on a fourfold foundation: 1) there is a clear objective or performance expectation guiding the student, 2) the teacher's instruction and assessment are both aligned with the goal, 3) the student has the necessary background knowledge, skills, and motivation for the new assignment, and 4) the student doesn't already know it sufficiently well. Effective time use in the school is a matter of extending these four conditions to as many students as possible on a daily basis. Therefore, the key concern involves organizing and managing instruction so that students spend the right amount of time engaged in the right tasks. This is known among researchers and practitioners as "Academic Learning Time."

Extending the school year may have a benefit in reverse. Research suggests that students may not learn a great deal more in the extra weeks of schooling we would gain, but the amount of vacation time for forgetting what they have just learned will be reduced substantially. That may prove to be a real benefit. Therefore, extending the school day or year needs to be done with a clear strategy in mind for how the additional time would be used. Community support for these changes will be essential.

Using Available Resources

and other administrative, counseling, and clerical support." (Boyer, *High School.)*

2. "Local school administrators should facilitate the use of special teachers who are qualified in the subject matter and should arrange for appropriate classroom supervision as necessary." *(National Science Board Commission.)*

3. "State and local school systems should draw on industry, universities and the military and other governmental bodies as well as on the ranks of retired scientists, engineers and teachers, as sources of teaching assistance where necessary and possible. States should modify certification requirements for special teachers who are qualified in the subject matter but lack certain education credits." *(National Science Board Commission.)*

4. "School districts should establish a lectureship program to permit qualified nonacademic professionals to teach on a part-time basis. Such teachers would devote most of their time to their regular jobs—in business or government or law or medicine—while also contributing significantly to education. (Boyer, *High School.)*

Using Student Talent

1. "The multi-aged grouping created by the vertical unit structure (that I am recommending) directs attention to the possibilities for peer teaching among students . . . those students doing the teaching enhance their own mastery of the subjects they (teach). The effective use of students as allies in the teaching process requires . . . a classroom ethos in which students are responsible not only for their own learning but also for that of their classmates. Under such circumstances, cheating becomes almost impossible." (Goodlad, *PDK.)*

2. "Every high school should establish a cadet teacher program in which high school teachers identify gifted students and encourage them to become teachers. Such students should be given opportunities to present information to classmates, tutor other students who need special help, and meet with outstanding school and college teachers . . ." (Boyer, *High School.)*

3. ". . . each state and local school system should make special efforts to increase participation by women and minority students in courses such as mathematics and science that are related to careers in which these groups are underrepresented." *(Action for Excellence.)*

4. "Each state and local school system must expand its programs or develop new ones to identify academically gifted students early in their school careers and to provide a curriculum that is rigorous and enriching enough to challenge talented young people." *(Action for Excellence.)*

Implications

• The tendency for some schools to be "separate and apart" from their larger social and economic environment will have to be changed.

• The use of more semi- and paraprofessionals in schools could allow teachers to share their instructional skills and serve as mentors to other adults.

• Teacher certification requirements will probably be challenged and modified in many states.

• As more resource persons are used by schools, traditional curricula, practices, and methods will probably be called into question.

• Giving students some kind of instructional or assistance responsibility could dramatically improve their attitudes, learning, and deportment.

Cautions

The recommendations in this section focus on using available resources better but do not provide enough direction for increasing the funds available to improve programs. As such, they strike at the heart of the culture of the school.

Using outside experts, no matter how unofficial their status, may be viewed as a threat by teachers. In addition, endorsing the use of

Resources (Cont.)
other organizations or institutions as appropriate settings for learning might undermine the school's special status as the seat of instruction and confuses its traditional responsibilities as a custodial institution. While this can serve as a safety valve for students who don't like the constraints of formal schooling, it may encourage students to demand treatment or considerations that the school is unaccustomed to granting or unable to provide. In addition, student tutoring and learning team strategies, which research generally supports positively, run counter to traditional expectations that students should learn, perform, and be evaluated as individuals.

Overall, then, the various recommendations included here convey a strong message that teachers and schools need various kinds of outside (and inside) help as well as changes in their delivery strategies. This message, projected in this way, may stimulate more organized resistance by teachers than any other suggested in these reports. Consequently administrators will need to assure that such changes are perceived and implemented positively by staff as well as the community.

Operational Component 7

Staff Roles, Responsibilities, and Rewards

The Key Issues

Two significant messages about the school staff emerge from most of the reports. One is that various means must be found to increase staff professionalism and performance. The two are closely related and are seen by most of these authors as preconditions for recruiting and retaining high quality personnel. But the issues go even deeper.

The previous six components of our framework have identified conditions that substantially alter the very definitions of teaching and administrative roles: goal clarity, explicit standards, clearly defined curriculum priorities and processes, flexible patterns of instructional delivery, effective use of instructional time, and the imaginative use of available resources. These practices are advocated in the reports because they pave the way for new kinds of work roles and working relationships in the schools. The reports imply that differentiated staffing and collaborative working relationships must be fostered if excellence is to emerge on a broad scale.

The following recommendations challenge us to think about new conceptions of professionalism in teaching, administering, and counselling—conceptions that are grounded in a very different model of schooling.

Here are some key questions to ask in addressing staff roles, responsibilities, and rewards in your district:

- Are there effective ways to bring about extensive communication and collaboration?
- Can we de-emphasize teacher grade-level or subject matter specialization in favor of greater diversity of instructional assignments?
- Can we direct collective teacher efforts toward curriculum goals and content that are clear, visible, and shared by all?
- Can we reduce teacher anonymity and isolation by improving performance evaluations and public recognition?
- Can we set in motion a collective commitment to the district's outcome goals and to trying ". . . in every way possible to help students reach them"?

Guiding Recommendations from the Reports

Work Roles

1. All staff should address the entire range of outcome goals for students, not just those which relate most closely to their areas of specialization. (Paraphrased from Goodlad, *PDK.)*

2. "(High school) teachers cannot provide the kind of teaching required to help students learn higher-order thinking skills in groups of 30 or more with overall teaching loads of 130 to 175 students. A practical way to reduce these loads somewhat is for a greater percentage of the school staff to teach and for each teacher to become less specialized." (Sizer, *PDK.)*

3. "Teaching must be taken out of its cloak of privacy and autonomy to become the business of the entire school and its staff . . . Teachers are not collaborators in any meaningful sense with teachers of the grades below and above them. For them to become part of a team responsible for the progress of a group of students over a number of years would be to create a structure likely to force attention to instructional and curricular matters . . . Consequently, four (full-time) teaching (positions) might be divided in a primary unit among a head teacher, two career teachers, an aide, and an intern. (Goodlad, *PDK.)*

4. "Local school systems should explore ways to extend the employment year for . . . teachers by providing reimbursement for in-service teacher education, curriculum development, student workshops and other ancillary activities, and by lengthening the school year." (National Science Board Commission.)

5. "Teachers should be exempt from routine monitoring of halls, lunchrooms, and recreation areas. School clerical staff and parent and student volunteers should assume such noninstructional duties." (Boyer, *High School.)*

6. "We recommend that the school principal in each school be acknowledged as the school's leader and as the manager of its instructional program. The princi-

pal should be freed from distractions; encouraged to give priority to improving classroom instruction; given sufficient discretion over personnel and fiscal planning; and put squarely in charge of maintaining the school's morale, discipline and academic quality. This means that in many places, the prevailing definition of the principal's role must be changed to put the principal squarely in charge of educational quality in each school." *(Action for Excellence.)*

7. ". . . In addition to competence in the technical areas of advising and counseling, guidance counselors should be selected and trained with appropriate emphasis on their sensitivity and understanding of the Nation's commitment to abolishing discrimination based on race, sex, ethnicity or socioeconomic circumstances." (National Science Board Commission.)

Performance and Compensation

1. "We recommend that every state and every local school district—with the fullest participation of teachers themselves—drastically improve their methods for recruiting, training and paying teachers. This improvement should begin with schedules of teacher pay that are competitive with pay in other jobs and professions. It should include scholarships and other financial incentives to attract the most able people into teaching. It should feature financial incentives for teachers, keyed to differing responsibilities and to filling critical needs in certain subject areas. And it must go on to create extraordinary rewards for extraordinary teachers; expanded pay and recognition for teachers, not just for reaching the upper levels of seniority, but for reaching the upper levels of competence and effectiveness as well." *(Action for Excellence.)*

2. "School systems should explore means to adjust compensation in order to compete for and retain high quality teachers in fields where shortages exist." (National Science Board Commission.)

3. "The evaluation of teacher performance should be largely controlled by other teachers who themselves have been judged to be outstanding in the classroom." (Boyer, *High School.)*

4. "With each professional advancement, salary increases should be provided. Such increases would be in addition to cost-of-living and merit pay earned within the ranks." (Boyer, *High School.)*

5. "We recommend that pay for school principals, like that for teachers, be related to their responsibilities and their effectiveness and we believe that extraordinary rewards should be established for extraordinary performance by principals." *(Action for Excellence.)*

Conditions for Professional Growth

1. "Top professionals want a career that gradually develops, with more responsibility and compensation following experience and demonstrated excellence. This requires differentiated staffing within teaching and salaries that follow this differentiation . . ." (Sizer, *PDK.)*

2. "For the long term, states and local school districts should ensure that teacher training continues as an outgoing process." (National Science Board Commission.)

3. ". . . We recommend that the states and communities, the media and business leaders establish new forms of recognition to honor the contributions of teachers and to underscore publicly their crucial importance in our national life. We have in mind special scholarships, financial awards and other tributes which express the value we place upon teaching as a profession—and our appreciation for great teachers." *(Action for Excellence.)*

4. "Good teachers should be given adequate recognition and rewards—from a student's 'thank you,' to cash awards, to active support from parents. Outstanding teachers also should be honored annually in every school district, by the governor and the legislature, newspapers and other businesses in each community." (Boyer, *High School.)*

5. "Every school district should establish a Teacher Travel Fund to make it possible for teachers, based on competitive application, to travel occasionally to professional meetings to keep current in their fields." (Boyer, *High School.)*

6. "In order to give principals time to reflect upon their work and stay in touch with the latest developments in education, a network of Academies for Principals should be established." (Boyer, *High School.)*

Implications

• Making the transition to this new concept of professionalism will be traumatic for many teachers and principals.

• School districts committed to moving in this direction will have to work with nearby teacher preparation institutions in order to realign the character of teacher preservice training.

• Districts must invest in the professional development programs that have the depth and duration required to facilitate and sustain these major changes.

• Districts will be compelled to develop high quality staff evaluation and differentiated compensation systems that can withstand legal and political challenge.

Cautions

Almost all of the reports embrace the idea that teachers (and, in some cases, administrators) should be evaluated more frequently and thoroughly than is generally the case. This idea has real merit. However, no report outlines an approach that makes clear the criteria to be used in these evaluations nor a procedure which assures that teaching and program effectiveness will be strengthened in the process. In particular, the potential roles of administrators, students, or other teaching staff as evaluators have been left unaddressed.

In addition, a transformation of staff roles of the kind and magnitude implied here will take time, enormous patience, and extraordinary dedication by all concerned. Research indicates that successful change in schools happens as the result of both "top-down administrative leadership" and "bottom-up staff ownership." Any one of the seven components in our framework represents a potential starting point for an effective improvement pro-

Staff (Cont.)
gram, especially since each is so closely related to each of the others. Yet schools cannot expect to achieve real excellence unless they consciously deal with all seven components in a consistent and thorough way. Partial efforts will yield partial results.

Nonetheless, we believe that the key to making excellence happen lies in a commitment to the definitions offered earlier. In particular, any staff that believes in providing "... the individual learner with an appropriate level of challenge and a realistic opportunity to succeed on a frequent and continual basis for each instructional goal in the program" will achieve excellence in their school. How they can work with each other, the administration, students, and the community to initiate this process is described in the following section.

Section II: Making It Happen

The time has come for action. The focus of the nation and its leaders is now on the schools. The public's expectations are high, and they are encouraging us to make our schools even more effective. Developing a plan of action for excellence is urgent.

If your school district has already developed improvement plans, you should be commended. But don't stop there. Reaching excellence is a long-term, continuous process. Take a close look at the steps identified in this section and build them into your current efforts whenever possible. Your students, staff, and community will reap the benefits. We cannot rest on our laurels as educators and concerned citizens. Our ability to act effectively while public attention is focused on the schools will shape our destiny for decades to come.

Action comes easily, but action which results in the successful implementation of clearly defined goals does not. On page 8 we presented a definition of excellence for our schools that will require continuing effort to achieve. In some schools, those efforts will depend on first changing long-established arrangements and procedures before progress can be made. In others, the organizational structure may be ready or nearly ready to accommodate new approaches.

In either case, successful action and purposeful change will depend on the capacities and commitment of those who lead and orchestrate the change process. By recognizing and using the following principles, these leaders can develop a context which allows success to emerge. Your improvement efforts will be enhanced by building on these principles.

1. Action Depends on Open, Honest Communication

At least two very important lessons have emerged from the research on school change and improvement during the past decade. First, educators want to understand how new methods, tools, or procedures will affect their work roles before they are willing to accept them. Second, this sense of "ownership" stems from giving people an opportunity to examine and question proposed changes before they are made official. Open, honest communication is the key to both.

While it may seem obvious, your school improvement program will depend on your personal willingness to engage in serious two-way communication about all aspects of your schools, with staff, students, parents, and community. Some may not want to talk; others may not want to listen. But the input, ideas, and motivation needed to move your program forward will probably not emerge until everyone recognizes and acknowledges what is at stake and what can be done. Without establishing some basis for mutual trust, your progress will probably be slow and difficult.

The most important thing that your school or district can do to set the stage for successful school improvement is to get people talking—about the good news and the bad news, what can be and what has been. It may take quite a while for rapport to build, but the dialogue must begin immediately and must include everyone with a stake in the school's programs and results.

2. Action Depends on Leadership and Support

To some, the terms **action** and **leadership** are synony-

Principles for Successful

mous. The term leadership evokes images of dynamic, often forceful individuals "who make things happen." Although this particular image is reflected in the spirit of some of the reports cited in the previous section, there is a danger in carrying it too far.

Effective leaders are rarely "Lone Ranger types" who single-handedly reverse the fortunes of whole communities of people. Nor are they people who command and expect others to follow. Instead, they are more likely to be risk-takers who see opportunities, interest others in those opportunities, support their collective desire to turn those opportunities into realities, and find ways of sustaining their efforts in the face of uncertainty or obstacles.

These, we believe, are the kind of leaders Goodlad says that districts must nurture if they realistically hope to improve their schools. While they need not necessarily be people in positions of official authority, these leaders must care deeply about school improvement and receive the support and encouragement needed to establish an improvement process and keep it going. The effective leader encourages others to do their best and finds ways to use their motivation and talents in support of program goals. Without this **sustained collective effort**, the likelihood of major change and improvement is slim.

3. Action Requires A Spirit of Inquiry

Successful school improvement depends on the willingness of staff and policymakers to take a thorough look at what is and what can be. This may be very difficult for some and initially threatening for others, but without it your school or district will not know in what direction to move, or why.

Inquiry does not prevent action, it supports it. Looking at what is happening, what makes it happen, and how it can be improved is the basis of all learning and human adaptability. Learning to look more carefully by asking better questions, gathering more useful information on a regular basis, and designing and trying out new alternatives are steps which virtually all successful organizations take to become effective and stay that way.

Schools are no different. Those districts with strong patterns of improvement are characteristically research-oriented in some way or other. They stay abreast of research, design and test out approaches, and encourage staff to share ideas and information about promising programs and practices. This means looking beyond the four walls of the school as well as within them. The results are worth it.

4. Action Represents An Opportunity to Grow

Action directed toward changing familiar patterns of operation and procedure carries many symbolic messages. Among them is the message that these old ways of doing things are not adequate. What may accompany this message is the idea that the people responsible for designing and carrying out these old ways of doing things aren't adequate either. Some people even take the attitude that they either need to be "shaped up" or "shipped out."

But this approach to the problem often leads to a great deal of understandable but unnecessary argumentation and defensiveness on all sides. The tension which arises reinforces some people's fears of trying new or unfamiliar things—partly because they lack confidence in their ability to succeed at them. Allaying these fears by setting up arrangements for staff and students to learn and practice new ways of doing things is one of the most important steps the leaders of an improvement process can take.

The intent of this process should not be change alone, it should be growth. Growth occurs when people are given opportunities to add to their skills and understandings so that their potential for success is enhanced. Growth first requires acknowledging that there are desirable possibiiities that are within reach and worth reaching. Then it requires stretching beyond the boundaries of familiar patterns of action in order to incorporate those possibilities into one's actual capacities. Growth must be encouraged but not rushed. Change without growth will not last. Professional development is essential.

5. Action Must Be Sustained To Be Effective

Few, if any, of the recommendations listed in the first section of this publication can be implemented quickly. True, some of them involve establishing new regulations or policies which can be done after a series of meetings. But setting up the arrangements to make them work and obtaining the understanding and support of staff so that they can work is far more complex.

When viewed as a whole, the recommendations selected here represent a rather substantial transformation of the structure and instructional delivery capacities of most schools. Certainly not all of these recommendations will need to be implemented in order for real improvements to occur, but those which you do decide to implement will have to be nurtured **on a continuing basis.**

Among the lessons we should remember from the Sixties and Seventies are these: First, few innovations "made a difference" because we expected instant results. Even when implementation was thorough, the time line for assessing its effects was too short. By demanding "instant results" we virtually guaranteed long term disappointment. Second, few "innovations" made a difference because they were never carefully implemented and institutionalized. Therefore, little actually changed. Third, few innovations made a difference because the "innovations" often didn't amount to much. Little was ventured so little was gained.

Don't hesitate getting started; just acknowledge that you're in for a long haul.

Planning The Action Process

Although the process you are about to undertake is a serious one and not likely to yield to easy remedies, some careful planning at this stage will make things easier in the long run. Included below are eight concrete steps which we encourage you to follow as you work with your staff, students, and community. These steps are not intended to delay your implementation process—just to increase its chances of success. Refer to them frequently.

1. Do Your Homework

Take the time to read and reread the first section of this publication. Become familiar with the definition of excellence on page 8 and its five major implications. Notice how they tie in with the seven operational components which provide the framework for the recommendations. Study this framework and be able to describe how the components affect each other. Understanding these relationships will be a key to selecting and implementing recommendations that will really make a difference in your schools.

Next, take the time to read some of the reports in depth, particularly those based on extensive field research such as Boyer, Goodlad, and Sizer. Get to understand the full conception of an effective school portrayed in each, and compare how each school would be organized and operate. Compare those different models with the definition of excellence on page 8, and note which models are more likely than others to support it.

2. Encourage Participation and Inquiry

Openly encourage your colleagues, staff, and community to engage in this process with you. Obtain additional copies of this publication and make them available to everyone. Establish times when they can discuss it informally. Most important, support their willingness to ask questions about everything in it. After all, it is not "the answer" but a tool for stimulating serious inquiry about how and why your schools function the way they do.

In addition, encourage the people around you to read the reports in depth. Their observations are bound to vary and lead to some disagreements. Take advantage of these differences and encourage further inquiry into some of the research which underlies the reports. The goal is not unanimity but a willingness to continue probing for good ideas and possibilities.

3. Anticipate Anxiety

Research abounds on the difficulties most educators have adjusting to change. But they are not alone. People in all walks of life become emotionally attached to the regularities of their workplace—often because they have learned to make it work to their advantage. Changing things introduces uncertainty, the potential loss of influence, or the need to cope with new technical demands that may seem tougher than one can handle.

But research also supports the idea that giving people a sense of "ownership" in a new approach smoothes the way for its acceptance and successful implementation. By allowing them to participate in discussions, to understand what is being proposed, and to design and develop aspects of the approach themselves, anxiety is reduced and technical skills are enhanced. This doesn't always happen immediately, but patience and genuine encouragement pay off.

4. Identify and Acknowledge Obvious Obstacles

If there weren't formidable obstacles to school improvement, most schools would be better than they now are—even the very best ones. Since obstacles to improvement do exist in most situations, the key to successful action involves setting up a process that allows staff and others to identify what they are, what underlies them, and what continues to hold them in place.

While there may be some initial resistance to engaging in this process, once begun it can release a lot of emotional and creative energy. People often feel relieved that lines of communication are opened, that others share similar concerns, and that collective energies can be channeled toward addressing things which most really do want changed.

5. Identify and Encourage Emergent Leaders

If successful action requires collective communication, participation, inquiry, and effort, then there is plenty of room for openness, initiative, and hard work on the part of all staff, not just administrators. As noted earlier in this section, it is misleading to equate leadership with administrative position, even though a successful school improvement process will certainly require administrators who embody strong leadership. But a serious school improvement program will probably require far more leaders than there are administrators available.

The key, then, is for administrators to exercise the kind of leadership that brings out the leadership in others. All staff need to be encouraged to take responsibility for making the improvement process work. Their initiative and energy will be the pivotal factor in program success. Since no one person can hope to influence and control everything, responsibilities must be delegated, publicly acknowledged, and rewarded. This may be the most difficult step for some schools to manage, but the potential benefits are enormous.

6. Build A School Improvement Support Team

Although the message in the preceding step emphasizes staff involvement, a successful school improvement strategy cannot be built around staff alone. Your success will ultimately rest on the active participation of as many segments of your district and community as you can tap. Forging them into a unified team will yield exceptional results. There are at least four aspects to this strategy.

First, active participation by key members of varied constituencies will establish legitimacy for your program in all parts of the community. Second, legitimacy means support, and support translates into tangible resources as well as human assistance. You will need plenty of both over the long haul. Third, these resources—especially the direct assistance you will receive from an active team of participants—will be invaluable in maintaining impetus for your program over the many months ahead. Fourth, this broad involvement is one way of unifying the improvement efforts between the district as a whole and its individual schools. Cohesion in the total community can be used to bolster particular schools in need of extra assistance.

7. Be Realistic

88 recommendations presented in the first section of this publication present schools with an impossible task. Perhaps "the most wonderful school district in the entire universe" might be able to implement all of them within a ten year period, but most districts could not and should not try. The numbers as well as the magnitude of the changes are beyond the resources of most districts.

However, being realistic is not the same as ignoring the challenge. During the past decade a number of small as well as large districts in the United States have made impressive gains in the quality of their instructional programs by concentrating on a few of the key factors in the recommendations included in the first section.

Being realistic means starting with a few things that you feel will make a major difference and working on them with determination—especially things which may already be within your grasp. But remember, being too timid is as limiting as being too ambitious.

8. Set Clear Targets and Deadlines

While establishing a climate of inquiry and dialogue is a key first step in this process, many successful districts find that this initial condition will produce school improvement by itself. Steps 1 through 7 should allow you to sharpen your focus. This step involves making that focus clear and setting deadlines for accomplishing specific stages of the process. Without this focus, it is easy to perpetuate broad discussions far longer than is warranted. In effect, the action process loses its impetus and becomes a prolonged needs assessment.

Treat these targets as real targets and set timelines that keep the process moving. Don't expect miracles, but do expect the process to slow down periodically. Let these program targets and timelines work in your favor: schedule meetings and give specific assignments in order to sustain the flow of work. Although patient but determined monitoring will be required, be sensitive to deadlines that should be postponed.

Major delays are usually due to the surfacing of obstacles. Therefore, meeting deadlines is less important than developing strategies that will continue to move things forward.

Taking The First Action Steps

Assuming that you have thoroughly studied the five principles for successful action and the eight planning steps just described, we encourage you to proceed with your school improvement process. The several questions listed in the final section of this publication can be used to start the process in your school. Use them as a way of encouraging participation and generating ideas. Be willing to translate the results of these questions into a longer term plan of action. Here are some specific steps that will help.

Read This Publication

1. Obtain enough copies of this publication for your staff, board, parents, and key members of your community. Urge them to read it and become thoroughly acquainted with its content and framework of recommendations. Have them pay particular attention to the issues, implications, and cautions surrounding each set of recommendations.

Form Working Groups

2. At the district or building level, invite these people to serve on working groups. These groups should take a fresh look at the recommendations found in various reports, and be prepared to turn these recommendations into suggestions for action to make schools even more effective. Working groups should be composed of representatives of a broad range of constituencies.

Set a Format for your Meetings

3.The format for these working meetings might be structured like this:

A. Be sure that all parti-

cipants have read this publication in advance.

B. Form small teams of eight to ten participants representing different community and staff groups. Each team should have a cross-section of people. Ask each team to review each set of recommendations and to agree on one as the focus of its work.

C. Be sure each team has a leader and a recorder. The leader should assure that all members of the team participate. The recorder should list all important comments. Each team, to the extent possible, should try to reach consensus.

D. Explain how to use the workbook materials in the final section of this publication.

E. Ask team members to **be specific** in explaining **what your schools are doing** now or **what they would like to see the schools do.** Also, urge them to keep an open mind about the recommendations they are considering, to accept views different from their own, and to avoid defensiveness. They should regard these recommendations as new opportunities for improving education and building support.

F. Devote one or more sessions to discussing each set of recommendations which each group has either chosen or been assigned. The questions found in the "Building An Action Plan" section of this book will serve as a guide to the issues and alternatives they should address.

Convene the Meeting

4. Get the specifics on paper, using the questions suggested in the final section of this publication. The answers to those questions will become the basis for your concrete plan of action. The process is designed to highlight the discrepancy between what your schools are specifically doing now and what they perhaps should be doing to deal with a certain issue (e.g., instructional time).

A. Identify "what we are doing now" in dealing with the needs pointed out in this set of recommendations. Be able to document the specifics.

B. Identify "what we should be doing" in dealing with this set of recommendations.

C. Develop the steps in a basic plan of action that will lead to the needed changes.

D. Examine each strategy in your suggested plan of action and rate it on the basis of its cost and importance.

Reconcile Differences

5. Have each team identify which other set of recommendations it may need to study before fully developing or carrying out its plan. You may wish to have groups which have addressed the same set of recommendations confer on their work and reconcile differences. Or you may want to turn all recommendations over to a task force which will integrate and reconcile the differences at a later meeting.

Develop a "School Improvement Focus"

6. This process might be used at the district or individual school level, perhaps even both. If the district has begun planning for improvements in the areas being addressed, those plans should possibly be incorporated into the plan of action developed by the working group. The result of this process could very well be a "Local School Improvement Focus" for the individual school.

Develop a District-Wide Improvement Focus

7. In moving forward with these action plans, the **school district** may wish to determine those changes that might make all of its schools even more effective and consolidate these into a district-wide plan of action. Its implementation process might include:

A. Conducting a community survey to determine levels of understanding and levels of support for the action plans which have been developed.

B. Assigning responsibility for each major initiative to an individual and/or task force to do further study, to develop more detailed step-by-step plans, and to work out its budgetary and policy implications.

C. Securing the needed policy and budgetary support through an effective communication plan which develops staff and community understanding, addresses organizational and legal concerns, and provides the training needed to make the program effective.

D. Monitoring the action plan on a regular basis to assure that it is on course and modifying it as needed to promote its success.

Form a Coalition for Excellence

8. Consider forming a formal coalition for excellence in your community involving representatives from several key groups, such as: parents, business and industry, labor, nonparents, educators, government leaders, and others. The result of this effort should be an appreciation of the important role of education in the community and the need for community support. Each group should understand the role it must play if the schools are to be as effective as possible. The schools can't do it alone. They need help and support. Work to build a consensus for quality schools.

Establish a Theme

9. Give your improvement effort a theme that the community and staff can identify with and easily recognize. Current examples include "Public Education: A Sound Investment In America," "Expect Excellence," "Effective Schools Are America's Best Bet," "Good and Getting Better," etc.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

10. Communicate the substance of your plan on a continuous basis through speeches, newsletters, contacts with parents, community leaders and the news media. Give progress reports to help the community and staff feel a part of the total effort. While you're at it, communicate some key concepts, such as the fact that education is an investment, not an expense. Support will grow from high quality education and effective communication.

Call on the community to recognize that the recommendations of the many commissions, task forces and individuals have helped focus attention on our nation's schools. It's up to everyone, educators and citizens alike, to make the most of the great opportunity before us. By working together, educators, parents, business people, government leaders and nonparent taxpayers can really help our schools.

Building An Action Plan

Districts choosing to engage in a serious improvement process know that there are many ways to initiate their action planning. The ten steps just identified represent one productive course of action which they are free to adapt to their own particular circumstances. We recognize that these steps are just the beginning of a much longer and more complex process required to bring about school improvement, but they do represent an important starting point for launching this process.

In the same way, the following questions can help local teams develop ideas, organize their thinking, and map out some of the directions they will want to take in improving their schools. The questions provide a structure for developing an action plan, but they should not restrict the way teams operate or the level of detail with which they may want to address issues, identify action steps, or develop strategies for working with various community groups.

While these questions and others like them have been used successfully in many districts to stimulate highly effective action plans, we urge you to use them in a way that best suits your purposes. The more preparation and thought you put into them the more your answers will benefit the schools and students in your district. And that, we believe, is the primary goal of this publication.

★ ★

The recommendations from the nine reports covered by this publication are clustered into issue areas or "operational components." Those components, seven in all, are explained on pages 11 through 21, and include: **goals and curriculum priorities; standards, expectations and requirements; instructional content and process; school organization and instructional delivery; increasing effective instructional time; enhancing and using available resources;** and **staff roles, responsibilities and rewards.**

1. Select the operational component(s) your group will discuss. Identify that issue area/operational component here (e.g., instructional time).

2. After reviewing the information in this publication devoted to the issue/operational component you have selected, members of your group should identify the key features of this issue, as you see them. What stands out for you? (e.g., a possible example of a feature: Schools may need longer, more flexible class periods.) Spend only a short time identifying features.

3. **What are we actually doing now** in our schools that contributes to effectively dealing with this operational component? (**Be specific** about activities and plans that **now exist.** Do not identify any activity that cannot be documented. Do not discuss the activities at this point. Just identify them.)

A.

B.

C.

D.

E.

F.

G.

H.

I.

J.

4. Based on research, your reading of these reports and similar literature, and your personal experience, **what do you feel we could be doing** to help us more effectively deal with this operational component? (Again, **be specific**. Do not discuss these proposed activities at any great length. Just identify them.)

A.

B.

C.

D.

E.

F.

G.

H.

I.

J.

5. **What specific steps could we take to get from where we are now to where we would like to be in dealing with this operational component?** Seriously develop what you feel will be a successful strategy. State your action steps in a way that any person reading them would know what to do if given the assignment of turning those steps into action. Only identify steps. Then, consult the instructions below to deal with issues of cost, responsibility and time lines.

Specific Steps in Action Plan	Cost	Responsibility	Time Line
A.			
B.			
C.			
D.			
E.			
F.			
G.			
H.			

6. **Further Instructions:** You have just identified specific steps in your action plan. Now, as a group, go back through your list and make the following judgments.

A. Cost: If the strategy could be accomplished at **no additional cost** to your schools, place the designation (NC) in the cost column. If **additional or re-allocated funds would be needed**, place the designation (AC) in the cost column. If the group feels the strategy is simply **not appropriate** in the context of the plan, place the designation (NO) in the cost column.

B. Responsibility: Who should be responsible for carrying out each of the steps in your plan? What department, individual or groups do you recommend? Write that information in the "responsibility" column beside each item.

C. Time Line: Place in the "time line" column beside each step in your plan your determination of when this step should be completed. Your time line will provide a sequence for your plan, if the steps are not already in order. **As part of this process, clarify what steps you should take first, second, etc.**

7. Do a brief review of your action plan to determine if any steps were left out because they were difficult, problematic or just didn't come up. Write those additional steps here. Briefly discuss whether you will be able to accomplish your action plan without them. If not, you may wish to weave them into your plan.

8. What formal or informal barriers may have to be addressed if you are to be successful in implementing your plan of action? Be candid and concrete.

A.

B.

C.

D.

E.

F.

9. Are there other sets of recommendations or operational components you may need to consider because of their impact on your action plan? Do a quick review of all issue areas covered in this publication and summarize your group's comments here.

10. Using the following process, develop a basic communications plan to support your effort. Before getting underway, review suggestions found in recommendations 8, 9, and 10 on page 26.

What groups inside or outside the schools must understand or be involved if we are to be successful in accomplishing our plan?	How will we inform and/or involve each of these groups or individuals (coalitions, newsletters, news media, meetings, task forces, other)? Be specific. Later, your school or district will decide which to inform or involve first.
A.	A.
B.	B.
C.	C.
D.	D.
E.	E.
F.	F.
G.	G.
H.	H.
I.	I.
J.	J.
K.	K.

11. What theme do you feel should be used as a rallying cry for your improvement efforts? (Make the statement short, descriptive and inspiring. Some districts are using themes such as: Public Education: A Sound Investment In America, Expect Excellence, Quest for Quality, Good and Getting Better, and others.)

12. Your completed plan should be given to the person designated as discussion leader. Perhaps your school or school system will review the plan, merge it with others and develop a "local school improvement focus" or "district school improvement focus."

Thank you for your contribution to making our schools even more effective.

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The final section of *Excellence In Our Schools: Making It Happen* is done in workbook form. As you complete that section of this publication, you and those who work with you will also become, in a sense, authors of this book. The success of this publication is in the hands of those who will use it to turn recommendations into plans of action leading to excellence in education.

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